

## The North Carolina Loyalists

by **R. Robert Mutrie**

The following is reprinted from *The Long Point Settlers Journal* Volume 3 Number 1, now out of print.

### ***Introduction***

This province would have been much poorer but for the presence of a remarkable small group of North Carolina plantation owners who lost all during the American Revolution and then raised their phoenix from the ashes in a transplant to Upper Canada. Formerly at the pinnacle of pre-war society, they brought with them only what would fit on a wagon or herd beside it, but in their minds they carried a dream for a new beginning more than 800 miles from their war-wrecked estates.

### ***The Revolutionary Period***

Orange County, North Carolina, with its seat at Hillsborough, served as a pivotal centre for the Loyalist and British campaigns in the southern colonies during the early American Revolution. This choice of headquarters evolved from the strong Loyalist sentiment in the district. It also resulted in Orange County being targeted by the Patriot forces for attack from 1778 to 1781. For additional reading about the Southern Campaigns in general, and the circumstances at Hillsborough in particular, I recommend the following:

Scheer, George F. & Hugh F. Rankin. *Rebels and Redcoats*. Originally published in 1957 by The World Publishing Company; republished in paperback by Da Capo Press, Inc., New York, NY.

Middlekauff, Robert. *The Glorious Cause*. Oxford University Press, Inc. (Oxford, England: 1982).

### ***Confiscations***

The years following the defeat and surrender of British General George Cornwallis at Yorktown, Virginia on October 19, 1781, proved disastrous to his former supporters in Orange County. The circumstances were most graphically stated by Colonel William Spurgin, later of Charlotteville Township, Norfolk County in a 1792 petition to Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe, of Upper Canada:<sup>1</sup>

*“... I Send you Sum Receipts which I obtained in ye Last War In ye province of North Carolina from ye Several Officers of Lord Cornwallises Army When*

---

<sup>1</sup> Upper Canada Land Petition of William Spurgin, Archives of Ontario, “S” Bundle 1, Document Number 33

## Long Point Settlers: The Pre-Norfolk Series

*they Marched through that place for horses and Provision provided to them for his majesties sarvis... has Never Received any Satisfaction for ye Same; Lost all of my Property on that acount taken and Soald from me by ye Reabils my Land, my Negroes my Stock and household goods and my all.... My Surcumstances is So Extreamly Lowe that I have nothing to Subsist Upon here any Longer. Nor I Cant Get my family any further till I get Sum Releaf Which I was hoping I Could have got on ye Credit of those Receipts.... Wanted to know Wheather there Could be any assistance alowed to poor People at ye furst Setling heare as I and amaney Others are Reduced So Lowe I Cant tell how we Could Support Our famileys ye first year till Could Rase Sum [ ] Crop.”*

Spurgin was not the only North Carolina plantation owner in such dire circumstances. In 1780, Robert Davis, also a Loyalist supporter had a 360 acre estate at Forresters Creek near Hillsborough assessed at £9,648, an impressive sum for the times. A year later, Robert's widow, Jane had an assessment of little more than a third her deceased husband's at £2,500. Their son Thomas Davis wrote “for his attachment to the British Government has been persecuted by the Americans during the last War”.<sup>2</sup> Robert Davis' believed brother, William Davis later of Saltfleet Twp., Wentworth Co. stated in his Upper Canada Land Petition of June 13, 1794 that, “for his attachment to the British Government [William] was severely persecuted by the Americans during the last War.”<sup>3</sup>

Another who fared badly during and after the American Revolution was Solomon Austin of Woodhouse Twp., Norfolk Co., formerly of Orange County, N.C. who stated in his July 16, 1794 Upper Canada Land Petition that he:<sup>4</sup>

*“... took up arms in defense of His Majesty's Government in North Carolina.... was taken prisoner at Moore's Creek Bridge and ill treated.... afterwards his known attachment made him obnoxious to the Government of Carolina.”*

Still another testimonial to the plight of Orange County Loyalists came from Anthony Dougherty, of Townsend Township, Norfolk County who stated in his January 26, 1795 petition that he the “petitioner and 2 of his brothers bore arms in support of His Majesty's Government and suffered greatly for their Loyalty.”<sup>5</sup> Over a year later on October 12, 1796, Dougherty wrote in more detail that he: “bore arms at Hillsborough, North Carolina.... through extreme fatigue.... came upwards of 900 miles...”

William Walker of Clinton Township, Lincoln County, a former plantation owner who joined Cornwallis' army provided the most graphic description of his circumstances when he wrote that in North Carolina he:<sup>6</sup>

*“suffered everything but Death by the American Revolution, had property in Land, 800 acres all of which was taken from him and Sold by the Rebels....”*

---

<sup>2</sup> Upper Canada Land Petition of Robert Davis, Archives of Ontario “D” Bundle 1, Document Number 9

<sup>3</sup> Upper Canada Land Petition of William Davis, Archives of Ontario “D” Bundle 1, Document 10

<sup>4</sup> Upper Canada Land Petition of Solomon Austin, Archives of Ontario “A” Bundle 1, Document 14

<sup>5</sup> Upper Canada Land Petition of Anthony Dougherty Archives of Ontario “D” Bundle 1, Document 47

<sup>6</sup> Upper Canada Land Petition of William Walker Archives of Ontario “W” Bundle 1, Document 9

### *The Migration to Upper Canada*

The earliest of the Orange County, North Carolina arrivals in Upper Canada documented to date was that of Thomas Davis in 1790. His June 29, 1793 Land Petition to this province's governing Executive Council stated that John arrived from North Carolina on July 25, 1790. He applied at that time to Colonel John Butler for a grant of land in Barton Township, Wentworth County.<sup>7</sup> Thomas was followed two years later in August 1792 by William Davis who settled beside him at Barton.

On September 10, 1792, Colonel William Spurgin had been waiting for three days at Newark (Niagara-on-the-Lake) to speak with Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe. Spurgin was the first of the southern Loyalists to suggest to Simcoe that others wished to come to the province, provided that financial assistance could be obtained. The Colonel noted woefully that he only got his family as far as Pennsylvania on his limited resources. Spurgin was the first of the North Carolinian group to take an interest in Long Point as a possible home in 1792. After his first visit, Spurgin returned to North Carolina undoubtedly touting the advantages of moving to Upper Canada.

The major migration of twelve large family groups- patriarchs, matriarchs, their children and a few young grandchildren occurred in May of 1794 with an arrival in early June.<sup>8</sup> The Davis family arrived first followed in July by their neighbours. Norfolk County historian E. A. Owen suggested that the group banded together prior to the venture and sent John Davis, brother of Thomas to explore the possibilities of a block settlement:<sup>9</sup>

*“It is said that shortly after the new province [Upper Canada] was organized these twelve families clubbed together and sent one of their number to the new country to learn what were the natural advantages of settlement, and the inducements offered settlers by way of grants, etc. The name of this trusted emissary was John Davis.... Mr. Davis reported favorably, and in due time the party was en route for the new country.”*

The Orange County Loyalists trekked more than 800 miles to this province. Some walked and some rode on horseback or in wagons. In the later stages of the trek through Pennsylvania and New York State, the roads were treacherous, swollen by the spring run-off. Owen's interviews with the grandchildren brought out the following traditional account:

*“They came in canvas-covered wagons, bringing their household effects and a number of cows and other farm stock with them....”*

A more detailed description of William Davis' earlier 1792 trek with his wife Hannah and their children was narrated by descendant family researcher John A. Aikman:<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Upper Canada Land Petition of Thomas Davis Archives of Ontario “D” Bundle 1, Document Number 7

<sup>8</sup> Upper Canada Land Petition of John Davis Archives of Ontario “D” Bundle 1, Document Number 44

<sup>9</sup> Owen, E. A. *Pioneer Sketches of Long Point Settlement*. William Briggs (Toronto: 1898), p. 76

<sup>10</sup> Aikman, John A., "William Davis", in *Loyalist Ancestors* by Hamilton Branch United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada. Pro Familia Genealogical Services (Toronto: 1986), p. 77

## Long Point Settlers: The Pre-Norfolk Series

*“Hannah rode on horseback all the way, sitting proudly on a hunting saddle trimmed with blue velvet, ornamented with a pair of brass powder horns. At one point the horses became stuck in the mire, and seven out of twenty were lost. The party finally reached the mouth of the Genessee River [Rochester, NY] and could not go any further by land. Thomas Ghent and Asahel Davis went on to Newark. There they were met by John Simcoe who sent a government gunboat, the Bear, to bring the entire party into Newark where a warm welcome awaited them.”*

From Owen's account, the 1794 settlement party travelled to Buffalo and then to “Old Niagara”, perhaps meaning Niagara-on-the-Lake, and they “remained there a short time.” All may not have set out and arrived at the same time. There seems to have been a one month lag between the Davis’ and the others’ arrival.

Who were the twelve families mentioned in the June 4, 1794 petition of John Davis? The first was his own led by his mother Jane Davis who petitioned eleven days after her son, the document naming her accompanying family- John Davis, Robert Davis, James Davis, and her son-in-law James Darickson. All of them were young adults, the two last named with young children.

The second family was apparently that of William Walker who also had a number of grown children at the time. His July 10, 1794 petition stated that he “Just arrived with his Family, (Eleven in number, Four of which is men able to bear Arms) from North Carolina.” With William Walker travelled Anthony and Margaret Dougherty and their four daughters. Anthony's January 26, 1795 petition recorded that they "arrived in this Province last year... from North Carolina with William Walker and his mother-in-law Margaret McCool.”

Another family led by a matriarch was the McCool group. Margaret McCool’s husband, Archibald emigrated from Ireland to North Carolina before the American Revolution and became caught up in the war:<sup>11</sup>

*“Archibald McCool was an inhabitant of North Carolina when the War broke out... joined the Royal Standard... served under the command of Lord Rawdon, died in the service at Charleston, South Carolina.”*

Both Archibald and his oldest son, “a Conductor of the wagons” transporting Rawdon's troops, died at the siege of Charleston, leaving Margaret a widow with a large family. In her July 12, 1794 petition, Margaret stated that she had just arrived in Upper Canada from Orange County, North Carolina with her family consisting of three sons, the youngest of whom was 18 years of age, and two daughters.<sup>12</sup>

The fourth family was likely that of Solomon Austin, associated with the Davis family by Norfolk historian E. A. Owen, who seems to have been one year early in his statement of the migration year:<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Upper Canada Land Petition of William McCool, 22 Mar 1811, Archives of Ontario “M” Bundle 10, Document Number 49

<sup>12</sup> Upper Canada Land Petition of Margaret McCool, Archives of Ontario “M” Bundle 1, Document 90

<sup>13</sup> Owen, p.76

*“Solomon Austin was one of our prominent old foundation builders. His family came to Upper Canada with a party of U. E. Loyalists, consisting of twelve families. They came from Maryland and North Carolina, and arrived on the Niagara frontier as early as 1793. The Austins came from Orange County, North Carolina, and previous to the war of the Revolution all had comfortable homes and kind neighbours; but the terrible result of that war made them homeless and despised aliens in the land that gave many of them birth.”*

Austin's July 16, 1794 petition stated that he arrived with seven children. Unlike most of the other families, his children were all under fifteen years old, the youngest a baby. I do not know the names of the other seven families at this time. E. A. Owen noted that the group included some from Maryland and they remain to be identified. Both the Austin and the Davis patriarchs had ties to the older state. In addition Owen mentioned that several young men with no family connections travelled with the party, including John Pegg, Henry Walker, and John Austin, a nephew of Solomon.<sup>14</sup> The two first married daughters of Solomon Austin after arriving in Canada.

### ***Settlement In Upper Canada***

The chief executive of the province, John Graves Simcoe showed considerable sympathy for the North Carolina group's fortitude and determination. He was undoubtedly impressed with their support during the Revolution, the subsequent loss of their plantations, and their epic trek from North Carolina. He was also in competition with newly opening Rochester, New York for the pioneers. Theirs were some of the larger grants given, certainly well beyond the usual 200 acre settlement allowances. Each of the heads of the households received a 400 acre or more allowance in Upper Canada.

Solomon Austin was allowed 600 acres in Woodhouse Twp., Norfolk Co., all of his children 200 more as they came of age. Jane Davis and each of her children were allowed 200 acres. William Walker received a whopping 1,200 acres and each of his children came into 200 acre grants in their own right, some of them in Norfolk County. Anthony Dougherty, of Townsend Township, Norfolk County received 400 acres and all of his daughters 200 more each. The widow Margaret McCool received 800 acres and her sons Joseph and William 200 each in Townsend Twp. Thomas Davis received 533 acres and then accumulated more by purchase. All of his children were entitled to 200 acres each. William Davis was allowed 700 acres and his children also received 200 acre entitlements.

The generosity of Lieutenant Governor Simcoe to the new arrivals was remembered by the Austin family a century later:

*“Governor Simcoe offered his executive log mansion at Newark to Solomon Austin, as a temporary shelter for his family until he could locate his land....”*

An obvious favour went to Colonel William Spurgin when Simcoe allowed him unprecedented permission to settle a choice location on Long Point Bay right beside the

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 83

## Long Point Settlers: The Pre-Norfolk Series

proposed district capital of Charlotteville. In total, Spurgin's allowed grant there and elsewhere ran to 1,200 acres.

The North Carolina Loyalists spread out across the western Niagara Peninsula and Norfolk County. While those who chose the Niagara Peninsula were enjoying relatively developing communities, those who chose Norfolk County set their sights on virgin territory. Colonel Spurgin not only pioneered on his land, but also in local industry. Even as he was identifying a home lot in August 1793, he expressed the wish to:<sup>15</sup>

*“set up a still... stream will afford water to set up a small grist mill which might supply the settlement at present.... has the opportunity of getting small mill stones and irons and the wheels, running gears, hoper.... all ready just to bring water on it and grind.... could have it running in a few weeks.”*

In the case of the Austin family, the chosen location flowed from adverse experience of their Orange County, North Carolina home. “They lived on high, leachy lands in North Carolina, and they made up their minds to locate their lands in some pleasant valley where the droughts would not trouble them as of yore.”<sup>16</sup> The Austin homestead was built on the rich land of the Lynn River Valley in Woodhouse Township, Norfolk County.

In later years the Davis, Walker, Austin and Dougherty families stayed in obvious contact. There were land transactions in each others' neighbourhoods and frequent marriages among the younger generations.

---

<sup>15</sup> Upper Canada Land Petition of William Spurgin Archives of Ontario “S” Bundle 1, Document Number 34

<sup>16</sup> Owen, p. 77